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The Little Bookfellow Series

For Esther A. Smith
Bookfellowly yours—
Flora Warren Seymour

William De Morgan

William De Morgan

A Post-Victorian Realist

By

Flora Warren Seymour

CHICAGO
THE BOOKFELLOWS
1920

Of this first edition, four hundred copies have been printed in the month of November, 1920.

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To

BOOKFELLOW NUMBER ONE

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Chapter

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VIII. [illegible]

Had I been told, ten years since, that I should live to write books that would find readers outside my own circle of near friends, I should have been incredulous. But what should I have said to a prediction that these books would be read in America and Australia?—and what to a forecast, strangest of all, that they should be thought worthy to be the subject of eighteen lines of verse as finished and skilful as yours just to hand?? I don't know, but I thank their writer.

William De Morgan

May 6/10

I. AN INCIDENT

There is something of significance in the fact that *The Jungle* was the public sensation of the year of which *Joseph Vance* was the literary event. One was headstrong youth, the other calm maturity. Sinclair's flaming and passionate impatience set the world afire for a space, a very brief space; then the blaze died down, as fierce fires do. De Morgan lighted the pleasant evening log and candle; and with the noise of the street shut out, we listened to the voice of a friend.

All this was not fifteen years ago. Sinclair is still a young man; the volcano active as ever, the eruptions as violent. But the flames fail to leap in answer; has his public grown calloused? De Morgan has passed from us three years since; yet for evenings past and many more to come we are the richer by unforgettable tales of friends it is a joy to know.

But of all that long procession, from little *Joe* to old *Mrs. Picture,* dearest to us is the author himself. De Morgan depicted life well because he had lived. He put real character before us because his own was sane, sincere, well-rounded. And about all the dear imaginary persons of his tales, enfolding and illuminating them, is the warm, rich, charming personality of William De Morgan.

In one of his afterwords "to his readers only",

De Morgan protested against "the practice of ascribing views—political, religious or otherwise—expressed by characters in a book to its author." In this he was fully justified; nor will any one attempt to fasten upon him the burden of *Blind Jim's* irreligion or the *Reverend Benaiah Capstick's* virulent evangelicism. But who can read these very paragraphs of protest without feeling an actual personal acquaintance with the writer?

> "Hold a writer of pure fiction answerable for the opinions of every one of his *dramatis personae,* and he will be limited in the choice of them to folk who are on all fours with every one else—conformists of a venomous type—good to be read about in bed by persons who suffer from insomnia, but good for nothing else. . . . . .
>
> "I may add that if the readers of this novel want anything altered in it, it shall be done in the second edition, provided that they are unanimous and that it will leave the text consecutive."

One may well be grateful that De Morgan did deal with others than conformists of a venomous type; but even they, under the spell of his wise and kindly humor, would probably have become good for much more than a cure for insomnia.

An incident thoroughly characteristic of the man underlies the letter reproduced as the frontispiece of this volume. An American admirer of *Joseph Vance* and his successors expressed some measure of his admiration in verses which outran by an additional quatrain the sonnet length, even as De Morgan's sto-

ries were apt to outrun the novel length decreed by present custom.

O, could I dip my pen in charity
  To write contentment on the book of years,
  Or could I win the tribute of those tears
The loyal heart pays out so readily—
Or might it be that men should think of me
  For one brief moment with a loving smile
  Perchance a lurking shadow to beguile
Or help to set some bond of sorrow free.
Thus wrought the workmen of an earlier day
  Who fashioned worlds more blessed than our own
  Where homely virtue sat upon her throne
And ev'n affliction's creatures could be gay;
Worlds where the weary traveler loved to stray
  To lose his trouble in another's woe
  And share another's bliss; but long ago
The Secret with the Masters passed away.
  Till thou, DE MORGAN, with thy magic pen,
  Taught joy and simple faith to live again.

The writer of this poem is a collector of autographs as well as a lover of English prose; and in his letter sending De Morgan the tribute he intimated a willingness to have his collection worthily augmented. The response was a bit of De Morgan himself in its generosity, its individuality, its charm. Neatly squared in the center of the page, the author made this hearty acknowledgement of the compliment paid him:

> Had I been told, ten years since, that I should live to write books that would find readers outside my own circle of friends, I should have been incredulous. But what should

> I have said to a prediction that these books would be read in America and Australia?—and what to a forecast, strangest of all, that they should be thought worthy to be the subject of eighteen lines of verse as finished and skillful as yours just to hand? I don't know, but I thank their writer.
>
> William De Morgan.
>
> 6-6-1910.

So far spoke De Morgan the author and artist. This alone would have been an adequate and far more than expected answer to his admirer's request. But De Morgan did not measure his giving. Turning the sheet about, he wrote this more personal message:

> My dear Mr. Seymour—Your lines are charming—I need not say that in my own conceit I have done nothing to deserve such a tribute. But it is equally gratifying to have produced an impression that I have done something.
>
> I suspect that I ought to know your name as a writer of verse. But indeed I know so little of my fellow authors.—You see, when I took to it, I had been so long outside the pale—making tiles, not tales. So forgive me!
>
> This irregular form of epistle will leave you a nice clean autograph on an island.
>
> Always truly and appreciatively yours,
>
> Wm. De M.

His thought outran the page, and the final half-dozen lines were on the reverse side, still carefully kept from interfering with the more formal message,

in order to leave "a nice clean autograph on an island."

No signature would be needed for the recognition of this as a letter from William De Morgan. The keen intelligence that makes rules and the kindly heart that goes beyond rule; the artist who moulds language to his purpose and the humorist who plays with it at his whim; the sincere and unaffected modesty that small souls never know—here it all is.

And where else, in today's books, save in William De Morgan's?

II. THE BACKGROUND OF FACTS

Some early reviewers of *Joseph Vance* jumped at the conclusion that it was in fact the autobiography it purported to be; and more than one gravely made the statement that its author was "a man of the people." One can imagine how De Morgan would have delighted in this phrase, giving it the whimsical twists and neat turns no other could impart so well, glancing at possible distinctions among "the people," "the" people, and people undistinguished by article definite. But a mere commentator—"or perhaps one not so mere"—should not attempt it.

Before *Alice-for-Short* took her place beside *Joseph,* some information about the author had been brought to light; and it was easily apparent that the experiences of *Charles Heath* were in many ways more nearly autobiographical than those of Joseph. Undoubtedly only the position of *It Never Can Happen Again* as fourth in the series saved De Morgan from complete identification with *Alfred Challis*; but by this time he who ran might read that the experience and spirit of the author sufficed to embrace these three and others, still leaving De Morgan, man and writer, something more and something better than any or all of them.

For a portrait of the author's father we will look not to *Christopher Vance,* but to the kindly professor

who was *Joseph's* foster-father. To round out the picture, add perhaps a trace of "the" *Professor Sales-Wilson.* For Augustus De Morgan was "the" professor of mathematics who wrote "A Budget of Paradoxes," not to mention a shelf of mathematical volumes; and who resigned his chair at the University College in 1866 as a protest against the refusal to elect James Martineau to the faculty because of his unorthodox religious views. Thus he allied intellectual genius with wide sympathies and love of justice; qualities manifested as strongly in his oldest son, William Frend De Morgan.

This heritage of spirit came from both sides of the family. The maternal grandfather, William Frend, whose name the novelist bore, was educated to take orders, but turned to a life of wider views and service. His daughter was first in the philanthropic and educational movements beginning to stir men's hearts in the early days of Victoria's reign in England. It is odd to reflect that even at the close of her more than eighty years of life her devoted eldest son, artist, inventor and craftsman, had yet given the world no hint of the final form his genius would take. Odd, too, that in the memoir she wrote of her distinguished husband, the single mention of that son is the date of his birth, November 16, 1839.

Looking back over the years, we can picture what must have been the boyhood of a child of these parents; reading Euclid with as great delight as did little *Joseph,* under his father's tuition; and out of lesson hours hearing the latest instalment of *Bleak*

House or *Little Dorrit* read aloud. As Harper's Easy Chair expressed it, in the last issue for the year of grace 1855: "You breakfast on Thackeray, you dine on Dickens, you tea-and-toast on Bulwer." Stimulating fare, this, for a lad in his teens.

In science, in mechanics, in industry, as well as in literature, it was a period of rapid and revolutionary development. The whole face of life was changing. The railroad was a recent invention, the steamship a creation of but yesterday. The telegraph was a still newer wonder. Machinery began to fill men's thoughts and dominate their lives.

Minds were stirring from the sleep of tradition. Science was digging about the sacred roots of the tree of authority. We carelessly think of the Victorian age as narrow, but it is the first step that takes courage and resolution. Questions of orthodoxy rend our world no longer. Our neighbor may profess the beliefs of any one of the two and seventy jarring sects, or reject them all, and we shall be none the wiser. Let him but pay his bills, and it is all one whether he be Parsee or Puritan.

Sixty years ago the English-speaking world took its beliefs more seriously. The word of religion was considered by most men a quite sufficient answer to new theories concerning man's descent. Geological ages could offer no proof that would stand against the express and verbal revelation of the Book of Genesis. Not only was the thundering "It is written" a complete refutation of the new ideas; it was complete

annihilation, for this world and the next, of him who dared maintain them.

Many, none the less, did dare. How faint and far-off seem the echoes of that mighty controversy! Yet many a man living recalls it, and De Morgan, who left us only yesterday, was a youth in the midst of it all; a youth who by right of his inheritance, his environment and his own nature was keen of sight and broad of sympathy. That this period of conflict left its impress on him is evident enough. Happily, it was an impress and not a scar. Not partisanship, but magnanimity, was his reaction. Trying all things, he held fast to that which was good.

In all the varied occupations of De Morgan's life we see the impulse to create, to originate. The story of *Charley Heath* tells of his desertion of art pure and simple for art in its applied form—stained glass designing. Miss May Morris, writing in the Burlington Magazine, links his personal story to the revival of craftsmanship led by her father, William Morris:

"De Morgan intended to follow the arts, and painted two or three pictures in early life, but, like other of his friends, soon gave up painting and followed the bent of an artistic invention which, thus unforced, simply and naturally settled down in the groove apparently destined. In Fitzroy Square he was working at stained glass, and being dissatisfied with the reproduction of his designs, set up a little kiln in which he made experiments with the metal. . . . The experiments in glass gradually led to others tending to the production of lustre pottery; his thoughts

were then turned in that direction, and so the work was founded."

This was in 1870; and for thirty-five years the making of De Morgan tiles and pots was to him and to those about him, no doubt, William De Morgan's life-work. Yet the real life-work, the art less fragile, the creation that was to make him beloved by multitudes in far countries, was still in the future.

Of De Morgan's artistic achievements, of his business and his inventions, this is not the story. But a picture of De Morgan the man in these years of craftsmanship shows plainly that the novelist was "there all the while," as *Peggy* and *Charley* asserted in doggerel verse.

The quotation which follows is again from Miss Morris:

"I think that discovery of the ideal factory must have been made in 1880, the year the two families made a memorable journey from London to Kelmscott by water in the Ark, a nondescript craft which figures largely in the family caricatures of these days. I have treasured mental pictures of this journey, with De Morgan in the foreground, always genial and content, whether called upon to scull our uncouth boat with its happy ragamuffin crew through the crowd of a genteel regatta, or to celebrate the voyage in verse and picture. Our friend on a holiday was full of quips and drolleries and ingenious riddles, all told in that thin high drawl with a sort of vibration in it that was nearly but not quite a laugh and that indicated enjoyment of his company and of his own conceit. It was good to listen

to. Some of his jokes took the form of doggerel verse, some were swift sketches, expressive and prettily drawn. In those days he could scarcely write a letter without clothing what he had to say in some form of delightful oddity. The youngsters of that generation will remember well as one of their household favorites Mary De Morgan's volume of witty and imaginative fairy-tales 'On a Pin-Cushion,' illustrated with graceful drawings by her brother."

In 1888 De Morgan married his artist-wife, Evelyn Pickering. It was but four years later that he was told he must not stay another winter in England, and thereafter the De Morgans spent the colder months in Florence, going to and from England always by sea. In a sunny rose-fragrant Florentine garden Tuscans were taught to work in De Morgan's method. The inventive faculty of the artist was brought to the aid of his industry, thus for more than a dozen years carried on in two widely different countries. The well known De Morgan tiles were painted in Italy and fired in England. Their success as art was not attended with equal good fortune commercially; there were worries and anxieties throughout; but the business was not finally abandoned until a year or two after *Joseph Vance* had met with a response such as a first novel seldom receives.

Genius that comes late to flower is a not unusual phenomenon; but scarcely elsewhere is to be found an instance of an artist of sixty-five turned author, and reaching with his first effort a vast audience all over the globe, wherever his language is spoken. *Joseph*

Vance was the book of the year in England, in America. It flouted the twentieth century fashion in length, in construction, in manner. Still the critic could not deny its importance, nor the reader its charm. If cudgels must be taken up, it is not the creator of *Joe* and *Janey* and *Lossie,* of *Dr. Thorpe* and old *Christopher Vance,* who need be on the defensive.

The world is richer for the years that followed. *Alice-for-Short* gave us a companion piece of childhood, and much more besides, in 1907; *Somehow Good,* indeed, must be the next year, that made us acquainted with the "merpussy" *Sally*; while in 1909 *Judith* the siren and *Marianne* the "impossible" wife tried the turns of a curious old law whose repeal insured that *It Never Can Happen Again.*

An Affair of Dishonor, in 1910, surprised all De Morgan's readers and shocked many. It was of another century and of another type. As a historical romance it conformed to standard, but as a De Morgan story it was disappointing. Some praised it, some condemned; but all agreed it was not De Morgan as we had learned to know and love him.

A Likely Story, the following year, shows De Morgan still dallying with the historical motif, yet conforming to the "suburbanity and Early Victorianism" which, as he whimsically complained, his critics demanded. But the story is more brief than "likely;" a mere chapter beside the abundance of the first four.

Critics began to shake their heads wisely, and say that the first successes could never be repeated. *When Ghost Meets Ghost* was an adequate reply. It was a

world of De Morgan folk—little *Dolly* and *Dave*, and the two grannies; lovely *Gwen* and whimsical *Adrian*; the two "middle-aged lovers;" *Uncle Mo* in *Sapps Court* and the *Earl* at *Ancester Towers*. Eight hundred pages were all too few while we lived and laughed with them. Did some one hint that it is too long? If we love our friends we are glad to have them with us. Wishing a De Morgan novel shorter would be like urging the death of one's parents for the dramatic value of becoming an orphan.

In early 1914 this book came to us here in America; not long before the black curtain of war was drawn down on the world. It had been down more than a year when De Morgan wrote, in refusing an invitation from a friend: "I have more than used up my holiday time, and must now get seriously to work or I shan't have a book ready when Peace comes. There will be very little novel reading till then."

The war, Mrs. De Morgan tells us in completing the last chapter of his posthumous novel, *The Old Madhouse*, revived De Morgan's interest in mechanics, and he spent much time and thought "on various schemes that he submitted from time to time to the board of inventions, always hoping to hit on some contrivance that would be of real service. In this way much valuable time was stolen from literature."

In the darkest days of the war De Morgan laid down his pen in the middle of a sentence that was never to be finished. The book which his wife was to dedicate "To our American Friends" was all but done. A world of readers lost a friend and companion January 15, 1917, in the passing of William De Morgan.

III. REALITY AND REALISM

Twenty years ago the terms realism and romanticism brought to mind such a contrast as that between *The Rise of Silas Lapham* and *The Prisoner of Zenda.* Two decades of controversial usage have so distorted the original connotations that these words are now more suggestive of the distinction between Maxim Gorky and Zane Grey. Underlying this change is an apparently simple reasoning. Realism deals with real life; real life is sordid, vile and tragic. Therefore, whatever is sordid, vile and tragic (and nothing else) is realism.

The fallacy is plain enough. The minor premise is true; but it is only a portion of the truth. The aspect of life which is not tragedy is none the less fit material for realistic portrayal.

One does not need to deny that life is sordid. It is enough to show that it is not always sordid. The accurate picture will show light as well as darkness. Nay, even light itself need not exist. A mere belief in it makes it necessary to the picture. The ability to conceive of light negatives utter darkness, and the continued existence of but a single optimist disproves pessimism.

De Morgan by his life no less than by his novels controverts the modern pessimistic obsession. That a man

can live to sixty-five years, experiencing ill-health, bereavement and long struggle with adverse conditions, and yet retain a sound and cheerful outlook upon life and a sympathetic belief in his fellows, is a fact of profound significance. The cynic will deny that there is reason for his attitude. He tells us the sympathy is blinded, the cheerfulness indefensible. But reasonable or not, the attitude exists, and in its mere existence refutes its critics. Decry the optimist as you will, you can not absolutely deny him. Happiness may be non-existent; but it is not inconceiveable so long as he retains his conception of it.

De Morgan is a realist in the older and wider sense. To his vision, life includes both dirt and diamonds. He is equally removed from the hypocrisy of thinking the universe all roses and strawberry jam, and the astigmatism that sees only decay and deformity.

He is realist in another sense as well, as opposed to the conscious artist. He will make use of the coincidental, the unusual, as life does but as the artist seldom dares to do. He will often give us the truth that is indeed stranger than fiction.

Both these characteristics are well illustrated in *Somehow Good*. This, the most carefully planned of his novels, is based on the most startling of coincidences. That the accident in the twopenny tube which deprived *Fenwick* of his memory should occur at a time when he was quite without means of self-identification and in the presence of the daughter of the one person in all England who could connect him with his past, is a sufficiently startling hypothesis. It

is far more untrue than fiction. It is as illogical as life itself. As an artistic device to bring together the lives of *Rosalind* and *Fenwick* after their angry separation in India a score of years before, it is scarcely defensible. As an underlying premise it is violent enough to make the whole story incredible. But it somehow doesn't. *Sally* is so charmingly human and alive that we can forget the improbability that introduces her to her putative father, since it is her introduction to us as well.

A few words sketch the plot. *Rosalind*, traveling into India to wed her early sweetheart, falls into evil hands. How greatly she is the sinner and how much the victim, in the unfaithfulness which separates husband and wife a few months later, is never completely told. She returns to England with baby *Sally*, whom *Fenwick*, coming to London after years of adventurous wandering, sees for the first time as the young woman who loans him his fare in the tube, just before he touches a charged wire and is deprived of his memory. *Sally* impulsively assumes responsibility for the stranger, and her mother confirms the action when she sees whom chance has thrown into her hands.

Two years later the two remarry, *Fenwick* still unaware of his previous story. Improbabilities multiply here, apparent to later reflection; but we are unmindful of them while we read. The return of *Fenwick's* memory bit by bit, the final shock of complete realization, his rescue by *Sally* herself from the sea, into which he had fallen while half dazed, make up the rest of the story. *Sally's* own affair with "*Dr. Prosy*" is

distinctly subordinate; indeed we could wish for that vivacious girl a husband less bread-and-butter-y; while the elopment of *Tishy* with her young man from *Cattley's* is more interesting romance than hers, and a keener study of types and classes.

One can imagine—if given to nightmares—what the modern realist of the more restricted sort, who is forbidden to mention the scent of violets so long as there are garbage-cans to enjoy, would have made of the old India story of *Rosalind* and *Jerry* and the unspeakable *Penderfields*. He would have spared us none of the hideous details. *Major Roper* and the divorce court reporter would have combined to give every brutal fact and every damning implication. But De Morgan has done a thing infinitely better. He has given us the woman who has won through all this horror and is one of ourselves in spite of it. This is the good that somehow comes of ill; not the reunion of the separated pair, not *Fenwick's* growing affection for *Sally*, the innocent cause of the old tragedy, not her unconscious payment of the score by saving his life. The real good is that *Rosalind* outlives the tragedy and overcomes disaster, in no highly dramatic way, but by the natural following out of the simple details of an everyday existence.

So, in *Joseph Vance*, a mere chance determines important developments of plot and character. The converted signboard that starts *Vance* the elder upon an independent business career introduces him and the *Nipper* to the *Thorpe* family, and thereafter his prosperity and his son's education advance apace. Just

as slight an event shatters the life-long affection of *Lossie* for her foster-brother; for it is an exchange of boxes that suggests the deception used by *Joey Thorpe* in his pretended Italian marriage, while "the other *Joey*," by his generous attempt to make reparation, assumes the guilt during long years of exile. Still another chance, the finding of a letter in an old valise, reveals the truth. This last, and the tale of the discovery of the manuscript, are time-worn fictional devices indeed; but much more than this creaking of the mechanism is needed to mar our delight in the story and its people. *Lossie* and *Janey* would live for us, old *Vance* and little *Seraphina* would make us smile, though the plot were as old as the pyramids.

Joseph Vance has less of a plot than *Somehow Good* or *It Never Can Happen Again*, just as *David Copperfield* has less than *Our Mutual Friend* or *Bleak House*. Yet, as with the older novelist, the pseudo-autobiography will probably be the best loved of the author's tales, while others win more of critical approval. *It Never Can Happen Again* is far keener and more clever; *When Ghost Meets Ghost* much finer in its social shadings, much wider in its range of character and event. Yet nothing diminishes the thrill with which we read of *Joe's* distress when *Lossie* marries, and the kindly humanness of the elders who divine his pain and help to cure it.

Alice-for-Short is a companion story of the little girl who comes up from wretched surroundings to happy and worthy maturity, and to console *Mr. Charley*, her benefactor, for his first unhappy marriage

with an adventuress. And apart from the delightful *Heath* family, from *Peggy* and *Dr. Johnson, Charles* and *Lavinia,* there is a whole Wilkie Collins tale of long ago mystery and murder, apparitions and strange wills and stolen jewels. And, stranger even than the ghosts De Morgan introduces in so matter-of-fact a fashion, is the story of *Old Jane* and her sixty-year unconsciousness in Bedlam. The wonder is not that a De Morgan novel is long, but rather that one book, however long, can embrace so much.

For the first time, in *It Never Can Happen Again,* De Morgan gives us the triangle motif; but in a way that is unique, even with this old theme. For when did author ever strive to do exact justice to all three sides of the triangle? Of all possible variations of line and angle, the equilateral is the one least likely to be presented in this connection. Yet the fault belongs to all three — *Marianne's* stupidity, *Challis's* instability, *Judith's* pride of power contribute equally to a situation which brings happiness to no one of the actors. Neither does *Marianne* gain wisdom, nor her husband decision, nor *Judith* compassion. Accident, not resolution, solves the problem in which all three have become involved.

Mrs. De Morgan wrote that her husband's method of work was to create certain characters, set them in a certain situation, and then leave to them the development of the story. In this instance, however, he must have had in mind from the outset the catastrophe that put an end in the same moment to *Judith's* plans and to *Blind Jim's* tragic life. But were they far less

useful to the story, still we could ill spare the maimed and blind father who was an "asker," and his little maid whose wide-open baby eyes saw so much in her brief day.

Here too we have for the first time a picture of English life outside of London, with a rector who might have stepped out of a Trollope story. *Athelstan Taylor's* whimsical encounter with the deceased wife's sister controversy is as English as English church and English law can make it.

When Ghost Meets Ghost, the last completed novel, is of English county life again, this time in the days of the Crimean War. There is a world between the two covers. *Dave* and *Dolly* are added to our portrait gallery of unforgettable children. Like *Joe* and *Alice,* they are befriended by those above them in the social scale, and rise to that scale eventually. *Michael Ragstroar* extends and amplifies the *Porky Owls* of earlier memory, to our endless enjoyment. The motif of return after long absence, physical in the case of *Fenwick,* mental as with *Old Jane,* here takes the form of reuniting twin sisters of eighty who for half a century have each believed the other dead. The tragedy of blindness recurs, in *Adrian's* misfortune. But these reminiscent features are minor in a story that ranges far as this one. Every class is here, the criminal and his jealous barmaid, the good old body *Phoebe* and the good old soul *Maisie,* to the *Earl of Ancester* himself; every age, from *Dolly's* scant three to *Granny's* ninety-odd; every locale from Sapps Court to The Towers. *Aunt Constance* and her middle-aged lover create a

charming interlude. The love and waiting of *Gwen* and *Adrian* run a bright thread through the pages. Yet—and surely was never stranger word than this!—the real heroines are the old twins, and the real story lies in their cruel parting and all but miraculous reunion.

The tendency to play variations upon a theme is characteristic of De Morgan. *The Old Madhouse* gives us a triangle again, but of another kind, not equilateral. *Lucy* is *Judith* emphasized; *Fred* is as weak as *Challis* and far more culpable; we can not forgive either for betraying the love and friendship of unsuspecting *Charley*. Whether he or the lost *Uncle Drury*, whose strange disappearance and ghostly reappearance dominate the story, can be termed the hero, is hard to decide; and for heroines we have a choice of three young women and one of an older generation. *The Old Madhouse*, completed, might not have proved the best of De Morgan's stories; but it would be ingratitude indeed to cavil at a tale that gives us such an array of new friends.

Perhaps the story of *Alice's* ring suggested the scene of *An Affair of Dishonor*. Perhaps the struggles of *Alfred Challis* suggested a companion picture of a girl in the toils of "the baneful Aphrodite no man can resist." However that may be, De Morgan wrote of an era with which he was entirely out of sympathy. His other tales range from the early days of the railroad to the coming of the automobile. *An Affair of Dishonor* takes us back to stage coach and postilion, a time we have been wont to associate with grace,

romance and courtly manners. De Morgan showed us that the grace and glitter concealed festering decay. He reversed the usual rule, proving himself optimistic concerning his own day and pessimistic as to the glory of the "good old times." For this he received the censure usually bestowed upon an innovator.

The real failure of the story lies in the suppression of De Morgan himself. Like Thackeray, he is always a part, and easily the most delightful part, of the story he relates. Indeed he need not tell us a story at all. He could make the multiplication table an adventure, and calculate the stress of an arch with a charm wholly his own, like the Polish actress who held her audience entranced by her rendition of the alphabet. We follow the lives of *Sally* or *Joe* with interest and sympathy; but happiest of associations is that our companion on the journey, keen and kindly, wise and whimsical, is the author himself.

IV. FRIENDLY FACES

There was a writer once who gave us splendid pictures of the sea and its mysteries. The spirit of our age has seized upon him, and he prattles obscurely of lovely adventuresses and infatuated youths. There was another who began by spinning marvelous tales of science and sociology, stories that opened up new vistas to the imagination, even without that liberal use of periods in threes which he was the first to popularize. The sex-obsession fastened upon him, and his work grew flatter while his purse waxed fat. A season of dog-days comes in time to every one, no doubt, when unrestrained liberty results in snapping and snarling and foaming at the mouth. The fury passes; but one fancies temporary muzzling might prove salutary.

It is difficult to imagine so sane and humorous a spirit as De Morgan oppressed by these doldrums. If he passed through such a period, he was luckily well beyond it when he began to write. He no longer thought the story of Paris and Helen the only one worth telling. He could have shown us the two forty years after the elopment, engrossed in a life so interesting that the early episode leading up to the Siege might well be forgotten. Anyone can find glamor in youth and love and beauty. To win our hearts for

Paris advising his grandchildren, for Helen when her locks are white, is a more difficult achievement.

De Morgan's people face time undaunted. *Peggy Heath* is changed but none the less charming, as *Sir Rupert's* capable wife. *Rosalind's* love story thrills us more than that of her daughter. Nothing is more unerring than the way *Aunt Constance* turns back the clock before *Percy's* eyes. *Fred's* mother is as lovely and lovable as the girls of his day. *Joe Vance* grows from the little lad who stones the sweep to the elderly man who divides his days between chess and the British Museum; yet our sympathies are with him all the way. That romance and charm are prerogative of no single age is a theme upon which De Morgan loves to play.

Time is at once a commonplace and the deepest of mysteries. We only essay to measure what we cannot essentially understand. It is a paradox to the reflective mind. Again and again De Morgan returns to its contemplation. *Old Jane,* awakening from her sixty-year loss of consciousness, for all her wrinkled face and trembling frame, is still the girlish bride. It is a parable of the soul unswerved by the Fates.

De Morgan frees us and is free from the non-essentials. With scarcely a word of direct description he creates characters who live for us as do our friends and neighbors. We remember that *Gwen's* hair is golden, that *Sally's* is black; but it is not such details as this that make the one *Phoebe's* "glorious angel" and the other *Jeremiah's* "mer-pussy." Just as a master of the pencil adds a slight stroke here, another

there, mere bits of line that somehow have each a share in completing a portrait, so by touches imperceptible grow and glow for us *Lossie* and *Judith, Nancy* and *Vi.* Somehow is reproduced the atmosphere, the intangible thing called personality, so that we feel them and respond to them as to living people, fiction forgot.

De Morgan's children are so sheer a delight it is hard to forgive them for growing up. *Dolly's* confiding three and *Dave's* sturdy five are completely adorable; the young engineer and the bride hinted at in the last chapter of *When Ghost Meets Ghost* can never win so warm an affection. "Our little boy was the sort of boy you were sorry was ever going to be eleven, because at five years and ten months he was that square and compact, that chunky and yet that tender, that no right-minded person could desire him to be changed to an impudent young scaramouch like young Michael Ragstroar, four doors higher up, who was eleven and a regular handful." But the reader confesses to a liking for the impudent young scaramouch as well, even though it was rather difficult to be quite even with him; and shares, for the time being, the author's kindly spirit toward "small boys yearning to be on active service, redistributing property, obstructing traffic, or calling attention to personal peculiarities of harmless passers-by." We share his affection, too, for that forlorn midget *Alice-for-Short,* and find it hard to have her forget her baby ways, charming as the *Alice* of later years proves to be. Of course "she was a good obedient child only in a partial or limited sense. When she obeyed you once, she considered that

that was enough, and that it was no business of hers to consider the spirit of your instructions." Granting this lapse from absolute perfection, we still find *Alice* talking to Pussy about *Prince Spectacles* or rehearsing the appearance of the "lidy wiv' spots," a delectable morsel of childhood. Even *Beppino's* spoiled babyhood has some appeal that makes us understand why the other *Joey* condoned his adult misdeeds.

One, indeed, remains a child for us—dear little *Lizarann* with the "stiss" in her side, and her devotion to her blind Daddy; *Lizarann* "the little plummy modest one, with both eyes stood open, and something to suck. Large dark eyes." So *Scipio* describes her.

Even the most ardent lover of Dickens finds it easier to laugh with *Swiveller* and the *Marchioness* than to weep over *Little Nell.* Perhaps it was the fashion of 1830; but to modern ears the pathos sounds exaggerated, artificial. *Lizarann* rings true to childhood, and ought to be loved a hundred years from now as well as today. There is no straining for effect in the last scenes; just the prattle of a little girl who is thinking of her playmates, of the sights she has seen, and most of all of her Daddy; it is in the unconsciousness of her talk that the pathos lies. "When I see my Daddy," she repeats as her breath fails; "when I see my Daddy, I shall call out, 'Poy-lot!' "

There is the same restraint when *Joe's* father goes. "It was as much the end as it ever is. The long diminuendo had died down to silence, or to a pause followed by a new movement that we who were left in the silence could not hear."

And so passes from our sight *Christopher Vance,* for whose creation alone we should be deeply in De Morgan's debt, were his other men and women forgotten. Not readily would we lose his whimsical ways and quaint expressions. His rise as a builder reveals him as cleverly as it satirizes the business world in general, from the time of *Joe's* eighth birthday and the altered sign-board to the rehabilitated firm, "C. Vance and Co., Ltd.," financed by little *Clementina's* glittering bauble. And whether he is *Vance* who has just received the sack at *Fothergill's,* or *Vance* of the capitalized Hat, for which "he went to eighteen shillings by reason of Moral Influence, and well worth it at the money he said," he is still his "dear old contradictious self." Here he is on his last sickbed.

"What's under this cover now?" he would say. "Is it nutritious diet? Because if so, you may give it to the cat. If it's food which would be fatal in my case, you may take the cover off."

In his characters of the class to which *Christopher* originally belongs, De Morgan is inimitable. Whether the victims of drink, like *Steptoe* or *Grewbeer,* or of misfortune like *Blind Jim;* whether from city slum of Tallack Street or the cottages about The Towers, they are not mere representatives of a class, but individuals. *Uncle Mo* is as complete a character in his way as *Dr. Thorpe* in his; *Michael Ragstroar's* indomitable old great-aunt, sketched in a single paragraph, stands out as vivid as a sudden ray of sunshine could make her. Many of De Morgan's people—somewhat after the Dickens analogy—have some distinguishing peculi-

arity of speech or habit. *Brownrigg* prates his Grauboschian philosophy; the *Sales-Wilson* parents converse only through an intermediary; *Aunt Izzy* continually fails to hear and replies to something that has not been said, quite to our delectation. But in each case the individual is far more than one animated peculiarity, striking as that may be. Each is complete, though in simplicity they vary from the "goozling" *Goody Vereker* with her martyrdom to ailments undefined, to so complex a person as *Challis,* caught in a wire entanglement of conflicting emotions.

It is in *It Never Can Happen Again,* most closely-knit of all the stories, that the keenest characterization also is found. This could have been predicted. For as De Morgan lets his people weave the plot, so the plot itself reveals the actors. Given these people, we know that they must have acted in such and such a way; and by these actions we learn infallibly what manner of men and women they were.

So poor *Marianne* reveals herself to us from day to day, restless under her position as the indistinguishable wife of a distinguished author, suspicious of the worlds he enters—both social and mental—which she cannot share; lending a half-unwilling and half-eager ear to *Charlotte Eldridge's* innuendoes; bringing on herself unhappiness and disaster unmerited by any error greater than that one least of all to be forgiven, stupidity. All through the story how one longs to lend her the saving grace of a sense of humor, or an awakening dash of common sense! But with them she would not be *Marianne,* nor the story what it is.

It is the highest test of good work to reproduce what is most familiar so that it is the most memorable. Go to the slum or the palace for your characters, and you have at the start the immense advantage of the picturesque in environment. It is but human to surround an earldom with glamor, or to find a fascination in the confusion of the crowded streets. The boy from Back of the Yards is a sociological problem or a philanthropic case or an artistic type, according to the bias of the observer; the girl from the Gold Coast breathes romance and beauty as she goes about to ball or opera. But your neighbor's boy and girl in the apartment opposite are two young people you speak to absently, if you happen to have been introduced; and sometimes wish in Tophet, when they betray too great a fondness for the ukelele and the latest musical atrocity. You do not weave any stories of which they are hero and heroine.

Alfred Challis and *Marianne* his wife come from that indeterminate class to which no one looks down in commiseration, no one looks up in admiration. "A class undefinable, but homogeneous and recognizable by symptoms. A class that didn't dress for dinner, a class that liked potatoes in their skins as a palliative to cold moist roast mutton *d'obbligo*; and did not condemn, but merely looked coldly on, at menus and finger-glasses. A class whose males smoked pipes and whose females refused cigarettes." Thus *Judith* mentally arraigned them.

From the middle years they come, too—married this decade or more, and lacking the glow and fervor

which the late teens and early twenties might lend to even a dweller in Great Coram Street; steadied down from days of adventure by a succession of petty economies and trifling vexations. "Commonplace" is written in every line of them.

From all this *Challis* has surprisingly escaped, by his sudden evolution into *Titus Scroop*, the popular novelist. But lacking the talent, *Marianne* has no door of egress. Homely, slow, lacking in charm as well as in wit, she is and must remain. A poor figure for a heroine, indeed.

Poor as the figure is, we would not wish it otherwise. *Marianne* is in no sense heroic; she is the sport of an ill-fortune which her own injudicious actions aggravate; yet we follow her destiny with an interest and a sympathy we do not give to handsome *Judith*. She is no mistress of her fate; she does not compel the reader any more than she sways her recreant husband or her sullen parlor maid; and for that very reason she is all the more real. She is as unmistakably a living being as ever walked unknowing into the pages of a book.

"Be good enough to note," one chapter of her story begins, "that none of the characters in this story are picturesque or heroic—only chance samples of folk such as you may see pass your window now, this moment, if you will only lay your book down and look out. They are passing—passing all day long—each with a story."

Yes, the stories are there; but not everyone can read them. Unless we have the eye of a De Morgan

we might do better to turn back from the window and take up again the book in which he has transcribed a bit of life for us.

V. SOCIOMETRY

It is inevitable that there should be applied to De Morgan his characterization of *Peggy Heath's* attitude —not a Freethinker, but a "free Thinker." Freedom was certainly his in all senses, not in the field of religion alone. De Morgan was a man of many aptitudes but no cults. He followed a trade without committing himself to the trade union. Thus, though an artist, he stood uncommitted to the fads and vagaries of the artistic temperament; though a man of business, he saw the shams of the commercial world and was amused by them as any outsider might have been; though an inventor and man of science, he escaped the absorption and one-sidedness peculiar to the clan. Finally, and most strangely of all, though a novelist, he was as keenly alive to the humorous aspect of the writer as well could be. Listen to *Mr. Hughes* as he discourses on

"the indisputable truth that the Highest Art—sculpture, music, painting, poetry — is never intelligible to the vernacular mind. How could any inference be more incontestable than that no Art could rise above mediocrity until a quorum of commonplace persons should be found honestly incapable of attaching any meaning to it? By making unintelligibility to the banal mind a criterion of superiority in Art,

we established a Standard of Criticism, and eliminated from consideration a wilderness of insipidity, which *Mr. Hughes* did not hesitate to call a nightmare. For his part, he was so confident that the system of Negative Juries, as they had been called, was sounder than any appeal to popular applause that he was quite willing that his own work should stand or fall by the decision of the Commonplace Intelligence as to which side up the picture should be looked at. He would go that length, and take the consequences. Let the Selection Committee of their proposed Annual Exhibition consist entirely of such Intelligences, and let the Hanging Committee hang all the pictures they were unable to make head or tail of, and such a galaxy of productions of Genius would be accumulated every year on their walls as the World had never before seen."

Judged by this criterion of Unintelligibility, De Morgan falls short of the Higher Art. In fact, some reviewers at times sought to entrench their own positions by assuring the world—or so much of it as could be found to read their reviews—that *Joseph Vance* was not Art at all. Certainly there is no denying that it is quite intelligible. It makes no super-pretensions. It creates no atmosphere of mysterious withdrawal from the lay mind. It lifts the dark hangings of mystery with which the self-professed Artist would surround his Art, and lets bright sunshine illumine the work, the sunshine of sense and humor. Like the creator of the talkative Italian portrait, he went about his work "in a strange, systematic way, quite unlike

what I have since understood to be the correct method for persons of genius."

So long as good taste, which he defined as "a quality of the inner soul, that gives a bias to the intellect," remained dormant, *Dr. Thorpe* declared himself opposed to poets of *Beppino's* school. He did not like his son's adherence to "a practice our Anglo-Saxon ancestors had of calling spades spades, and rarely talking of anything else." We fancy the author concurred in this view. When it was necessary he could discuss spades; but he felt there were many other topics as well worthy of consideration. So when he touches upon "a subject every accepted phrase relating to which is an equivocation or an hypocrisy," he assumes that his reader is not a reporter for the daily press, and that salacious tit-bits are not the form of literary fare he must purvey. Not his "the customary paltering with the meaning of words that enables modern novels to be written about the damnedest things in the universe."

This last phrase, however, betrays an emphasis into which De Morgan's sunny humor is seldom led. On all questions he is so liberal that one is not inclined to suspect him of "views" at all. Certainly nothing is further from his intent than the novel with a purpose. There has been a vast supply of these, designed to show the need of social reforms or economic changes; Dickens gave us of the earliest, crusading against the Poor Laws or Government Circumlocution. De Morgan apparently has not this crusading instinct so deeply implanted. It is his maturity, again; for ex-

perience has taught him the futility of expecting a panacea.

Yet in the course of the novels one finds not a little of dissatisfaction with existing inequalities. The iniquities of the law come in for many a keen thrust—"the amazing resources of legislation for deciding that the weaker party is in the wrong." The inconsistencies of pronouncements Parliamentary and ecclesiastical are after all the main theme of *It Never Can Happen Again*; granting De Morgan's disavowal of responsibility for the opinions of its characters, there is a residuum of amused and amusing comment that is sponsored by the leading character of them all, the author himself. The *Barnacles* and the *Veneerings* are clumsy pictures indeed compared with the sure touch that satirizes *Brownrigg* and *Ramsay Tomes*.

That De Morgan was keenly aware of the suffering in the world, many a passage testifies. *Peggy's* reflections on the thousands of little *Alices* unsaved from the slums, the portrayal of the downward course of the *Kavanagh* fortunes, *Blind Jim's* sad story—a dozen instances come to mind. We would almost dub him feministic in his reflections on the injustices done in law and custom to an *Aunt M'riar*. We might think him a reformer of another type when we look upon the pictures he has drawn of men caught in the clutches of alcoholism, *Steptoe, Kavanagh* or *Christopher Vance* himself.

"The dipsomaniac, in spite of the many syllables that palliate him, is no better than the sot in his forlorn brevity. The former obtains access to stimulants

whenever he is able to elude the watchfulness of his guardians; the latter gets nips when you ain't lookin'. The former endeavors to conceal the symptoms of intoxication; the latter tries to 'umbug you into thinking him sober. The former suffers agonies of remorse over each relapse, and follows it with good resolutions, which he breaks. The latter does it again. That is the only traceable difference. For both go to the bad."

This smacks of the protest against "drink—the evil principle whose name accounts for half the ills flesh would have been so glad never to come to the enjoyment of, but must perforce inherit." But even more it shows freedom from that sociological prejudice which confines the evil to those denominated "the lower classes." The detachment of De Morgan's view of the different strata of English society has never been equalled. He is at home among them all, and alive everywhere to the humor of the fine-drawn distinctions so much insisted upon. "It may be a snobbish world, but what a big one it is! And what a lot of power one's elbow gets from the sympathy of it!" So mused *Challis*, accepting a knighthood despite his jeer at the "performing classes," and choosing for his son "the tenets of the well-to-do" in the face of his own irreligion. *Aunt Priscilla*, "under an impression that in early life she mixed in circles," *Lady Arkroyd*, smiling "in a De Bretticent way;" *Vi's* Leander, who swims ashore with a pedigree; *Mrs. Sales-Wilson* objecting to the young haberdasher; *Aunt Izzy*, "cherishing memories of people almost too well-connected to live;" *Mrs. Tapping* and her disap-

proval of *Alethea's* young man—what a labyrinth of proprieties and prejudices!

Sally refuses to enter the labyrinth by admitting social distinctions. "If sociometry was to be a science, it must be worked out without axioms and postulates," such as *Tishy's* mother might lay down. But *Sally,* according to the author, "was a disciple of what used to be called Socialism; only really nowadays such a lot of things get called Socialism that the word has lost all the discriminative force one values so much in nouns substantive." In the Sally-sense we might term De Morgan a disciple; an individualistic type of socialist, so to speak. For it is in a splendid disregard of class theories that *Alice* or *Dave* or *Dolly* is transplanted, to thrive in a more healthful atmosphere; yet the problem is solved in a way that must always be personal, and limited to a few individuals. Of "the odd third that would pay so well for transplanting" they are fine examples; but a wholesale transfer, or a general amelioration of conditions, is not predicted. There is no suggestion that poverty can be abolished, nor even that it will succumb to "Education, that most formidable inroad on ignorance of what we want to know nothing about." In fact, the conclusion—all the more powerful because indirect—is that each problem is *sui generis,* calling for a special solution all its own. De Morgan does not view Mankind in the Mass. Certainly he does not place whole-souled reliance upon such an Institution as that to which *Sally* and *Dr. Vereker* referred *Mrs. Shoosmith's* case, an "institution that called for a vast amount of checking of

totals, comparisons of counterfoils, inspection of certificates, verification of data—everything, in short, of which an institution is capable." Remembering with *Professor Fraser* that "no two advocates of Socialism were agreed upon its details; or, he might add, its fundamental principles," he offers no short cut to the millenium. He does not subscribe to the doctrine that classes are divinely ordained, and the gulfs between impassible; but he has no quick and ready scheme for bridges over which everyone may pass. A believer in democracy, practicing it in its finest aspect—else how could he draw such varied types with so sure a touch?—he lacks the reformer's urge to impose that belief and practice upon the rest of the world.

In fact, one can not be a reformer without a dash of intolerance, and in this De Morgan was quite lacking. One can not set out to make the world over again without a determined concentration upon a single purpose that shuts out everything else; and De Morgan's mind was too comprehensive to be thus narrowed. One can not burn with fervor for a Cause without adding as an article of faith one's own complete worthiness to carry on the high emprise; and De Morgan was anything but egotist. His business was to reproduce the world about him; he did not strive to re-create it.

He found himself in the world, as did *Challis* at Royd Hall, "in a sort of hornet's nest of Reformers, every one of them anxious to point out avenues of salvation for Society." And in his musings we catch glimpses of many an experience unrevealed.

"It is bewildering to reflect on the number of avenues open to Society by which to approach its own final perfection. And disappointing, too, when a start has been made along some promising one, to come so soon to a parting of the ways, with never a signpost—not so much as a stray uncrucified Messiah for a guide—as the night falls over the land. For even so, each last new Theory of Perfectibility, each panacea for the endemic that afflicts us, seems to pass from the glory of its dawn to the chill hours of its doubt; and its Apostles fall away and change their minds, and its subscribers discontinue their subscriptions, and it becomes out of date. And those who have not lain low, like B'rer Fox, but have committed themselves past all recall to its infallibility, are sorry because they can not remind us that they said so all along, only they were never paid the slightest attention to."

Time and Nature alike dealt generously with De Morgan; disillusionment with years seems inevitable, but in his case disillusionment did not mean bitterness. Rather did the fading of rosy mist bring for him a clearer comprehension of real values, a broader outlook upon the huge old enigma we are all struggling to solve. At twenty he might have written with the vehemence of the man of a single idea; at seventy he saw life steadily and saw it whole. He knew the vastness of the world and the complexity of its problems, and felt—perhaps too keenly—the unimportance of the individual in the scheme.

"Gracious mercy!—suppose we were all suddenly to 'realize' our own insignificance! . . . . But

really, the subject is not one that will bear thinking of. Dismiss your insignificance with a caution! And pray for a cloudy day, that the stars may not remind you of it."

VI. SPECULATIONS

One of the biographers of Augustus De Morgan relates that he reported his family to the taker of the religious census as "Christians unattached." In other words, he subscribed to what he conceived to be the spirit of Christianity without committing himself to the tenets of any particular sect. In the middle of the nineteenth century, this was an attitude both unusual and courageous. But had he never offered this description, we should have been able to guess it from the novels of his eldest son. The conclusion that William De Morgan grew up in the midst of religious discussion, free alike from cant and from partisanship, that his thoughts ranged from the oldest metaphysics to the newest cult without sense of things forbidden, is inevitable.

One catches a glimpse of an attitude rarely attained in either the Victorian era or the present—the placing of matters of religion on precisely the same footing as other discussions. Here is some one who has never been taught in infancy to approach certain words or certain thoughts with bated breath or on tiptoe. The result is as refreshing as it is direct.

Foolish indeed would be the attempt to identify De Morgan's views with those of his characters; for these characters present as wide a variety of opinions

and prejudices as could well be found. We have the uneducated scoffer in *Christopher Vance*, the more sophisticated skeptic in *Challis* or *Adrian Torrens*. We have the "chapel" represented by *Mrs. Craik* or the *Reverend Benaiah Capstick*. We have a literal believer in the Thirty-Nine Articles in the *Reverend Gus Fossett* and a liberally inclined rector of the church militant type in *Athelstan Taylor*. We have old philosophies and new discussed and expounded. And each in his own vein sets forth the beliefs of his heart. Of the author's own feeling on these questions we have an occasional revealment, as when he discusses *Marianne's* acceptance of "her mother's Choctaw Deity, a creation of the sullen vices of her own mind, on the strength of the assurance that he was also the God of the man who paid, in Syria, the penalty of the most intrepid and magnificent attempt to touch the hearts of men the world has ever known. Let him"—a possible accuser of the story as irreverent —"be sure that when he talks of 'things sacred' he is really holding those things sacred that that man was tortured to death for proclaiming the truth of, two thousand years ago, and that he is not exalting the comicalities of a Theologism."

It is these comicalities that engage the author's humor and our interest, never the vital realities of belief and faith. It is on points such as these that *Challis* and *Taylor* argue goodhumoredly. *Challis* is thorough unbeliever; but then, *Taylor* himself is under suspicion of doctrinal unsoundness in the view of his friends the *Fossetts*, who prayed for his guidance away

from the paths of "orthodox, hetrodox and cacodox dissidents. Of which last, the one they preferred to call Socinianism was the most poisonous and insidious. A creed baited with mere veracities, to get a bite from the unwary!" While *Taylor* found *Challis* "a great heathen—but a very good Christian for all that. I took all his ideas for my sermon."

In their discussion *Challis* has usually the better argument; but then, the rector is the better man. *Challis* was the "unpractical" skeptic who "while he avoided or ignored all experts in Applied Religion, was unprepared with any substitute for it."

"Never having been thrashed into a Creed in childhood, and being liberally ready to doubt any Creed of his own concoction, he associated Religions, broadly speaking, with the opening and closing of shops on Sunday, the suppression of bands in the parks, and the singing of the same tune over and over again in unison at street-corners. He had cultivated Ritual so far as to be able, on emergency, to take off his hat and look intently into it, watching anxiously the while for subsidence of religious symptoms without. Qualified practitioners of Religion, whether Priest or Presbyter, he looked on as mere survivals of a past age perishing slowly of Civilization."

Taylor was perhaps for his part as little wed to the formalities of creed and ritual; for he "had ridden roughshod over a hundred scruples on petty details" in his enthusiasm to don "the uniform of his territorial regiment in the army that, as he conceived, was being forever enrolled in the service of Ormuzd

against Ahrimanes. And yet there was never a man with a more earnest belief in his inherited mission to fight the Devil in any of the half-score of Churches that look askant at one another, and waste good powder and shot over the creeds their congregations shout in unison."

These two, *Challis* with his "inveterate propensity to quip and paradox," disdaining all forms, and *Taylor* with his practical working religion, far apart as they are on matters of faith, at heart have substantially the same view of the Church—a form of warfare against the Powers of Darkness. *Challis* disapproves the method but would not interfere lest he halt the combat; the rector too has his misgivings, but believes himself bound to give aid in the conflict.

Or, for a less technical but more personal view, hear *Rosalind* brought to testify before the court of her own conscience, on the concealments and evasions she must practice to keep hidden from *Sally* the old story and its unhappiness. In this court she is happier "than she was in that of St. Satisfax. . . Outside the precinct of the saint, the brief working morality that considers other folk first was enough for her; within it, the theologism of an offended deity still held a traditional sway.

"However, she was clear about one thing. She would apologize in prayer; but she would go to hell rather than have *Sally* made miserable. Thus it came about that *Mrs. Fenwick* continued a very devout church-goer, and, as her husband never left her side when he had a choice, he, too, became a frequent guest

of St. Satisfax, whom he seemed to regard as a harmless though fantastic person who lived in some century or other, only you always forgot which."

Evidently she has failed to innoculate *Sally* with that same theologism; for that irreverent young lady breezily comments on "an Evangelical start—a Low Church turn-out," and characterizes our *Mr. Prince* as "a Tractarian, and a Ritualist, and a Puseyite, and an Anglican. That's his game!"—with no sense of possible offense to constituted Authority.

Now, to step to an entirely different level, do a bit of eavesdropping while young *Ragstroar* reads Scripture to his great-aunt.

"*Micky's* only misgivings on his visit to *Aunt Elizabeth Jane* were connected with the Family Bible to which his old relative was devoted, and with her disposition to make him read the Psalms aloud. Neither of them attached any particular meaning to the text; she being contented with its religious aura and fitness for Sunday, and he absorbed in the detection of correct pronunciation by spelling, a syllable at a time. So early an allusion to this affliction disheartened *Micky* on this occasion.

" 'Oh, 'ookey, Arntey,' said he dejectedly, 'I say now—look here! Sha'n't I make it Baron Munch Hawson, only just this once?' For his aunt possessed, as well as the Holy Scriptures, a copy of Baron Munchausen's Travels and a Pilgrim's Progress. Conjointly, they were an Institution, and were known as Her Books.

"But she resisted the secular spirit. 'On Sunday

morning, my dear!' she exclaimed, shocked. 'How ever you *can!* Now if on'y your father was to take you to Chapel, instead of such a bad example, see what good it would do you both.'

"The ounce of influence that *Aunt Elizabeth Jane* alone possessed told on *Michael's* stubborn spirit, and he did not contest the point. 'Give us the 'Oly Bible!' said he briefly. 'Where's where you was?'

" 'That's a good boy! Now you just set down and read on where I was. To, the, chief, musician, and the next word's a hard word and you'll have to spell it.' For, you see, *Aunt Elizabeth Jane's* method was to go steadily on with a text, and not distinguish titles and stage directions.

"So her nephew, being docile, tackled the fifty-second Psalm, and did not flinch from *m, a, s,* mass—*c, h, i, l,* chill; total, Mass-Chill—nor from *d, o,* do—*e, g,* hegg; total, Do-Hegg. But when he came to Abimelech, he gave him up, and had to be told. However, he labored on through several verses, and the old charwoman listened in what might be called a Sunday rapture, conscious of religion, but not attaching any definite meaning to the words. As for *Micky,* he only perceived that David and Saul, Doeg the Edomite, and Abimelech the Priest, were religious, and therefore bores. He had a general idea that the Psalmist could not keep his hair on. He might have enjoyed the picturesque savagery of the story if *Aunt Elizabeth Jane* had known it well enough to tell him. But when you read for flavor, and ignore import, the plot has to go to the wall."

All this comment on the two and seventy jarring sects shows a mind prone to philosophical searchings; and as is to be expected in one of his years, De Morgan has many a speculation to record on that question which of all has perhaps most engaged man's thought since thought began—the inquiry as to the life beyond the present, the possible survival of human personality. It remained for *Christopher Vance* to put the whole question of "Bogey things" into a single phrase when he commented that poor old *Peter Gunn* by this time "might be either a Corpse or a Ghost, accordin' as you look at it." He inclined toward the latter theory; while *Dr. Thorpe* expressed the same idea in more scholarly words:

"I am convinced that there are two distinct classes of people in the world; those that feel that they themselves are *in* a body; and those that feel that they themselves *are* a body, with something working it. *I* feel like the contents of a bottle, and am very curious to know what will happen when the bottle is uncorked."

As *Adrian Torrens* comments, "A certain amount of nervousness about Eternity is inseparable from our want of authentic information." His hope was for "a healthy and effectual extinction." *Janey* and *Dr. Thorpe* were firmly convinced of a survival so actual as practically to deny death, as did Voltaire's ghost. *Joe Vance* likes the Egyptian view that the death of a man is the birth of a soul, but does not in the least shrink from the prospect of becoming "that entirely self-satisfied thing, a Non-Entity." *Dr. Vereker* takes

the materialistic view—"said that the researches of modern science all tended to prove that extinction waited us at death." *Taylor's* reflections as he goes to see the last of *Steptoe* touch on the unconscious attitude that often underlies stated beliefs.

"How if he himself, who preached a Resurrection or Hereafter that like as not this scientific gentleman did not believe in—how if he was less keen to preserve this depraved life, as a chance to clean it up a bit for a wholesomer departure later on, than the doctor in his professional enthusiasm, his sportsmanlike eagerness to win in a game of Therapeutics against Death? He felt a little ashamed at having thought more than once that the miserable victim of vice would be 'best out of the way.' Out of the way!—where? And then, how did he know that this consensus of all mortals to try to save even the most worthless lives may not be an unconscious tribute to the underlying sense of immortality throughout Mankind? Would an honest belief in extinction fight to preserve a life that is a pain to itself and a curse to its neighbors?"

De Morgan has no ready-made answer for these and other queries. And toward those who have some system or theory, religious or metaphysical, calculated to set all inquiry at rest, he has the same vein of ironical detachment he preserves toward the propounders of the Grauboschian philosophy and their like. "Word-changers in the temple of the Inscrutable," *Challis* dubbed them. *Mr. Brownrigg* maintained that

"The final solution of all questions could not be regarded with complacency by a thoughtful world; and

the recognition of Metaphysical Equilibrium, in questions which the Primitives of Philosophy had condemned as unanswerable, was a welcome addition to the resources of Modern Thought.''

In which Metaphysical Equilibrium this discussion too may well be at rest.

VII. BOGEY THINGS

The recent rise in Spiritualistic stock is due, they say, to the Great War. De Morgan anticipated this movement by several years. However, Psychical Research is by no means new; and ghost stories have been told since the world began. The novelty here, again, is in the author's attitude toward the phenomena he describes. It is the same air of unconcern that seems so unusual in his philosophical and religious discussions. It is not at all the studied impartiality designed to win your belief for the tale. There is no air of mystery, no attempt to impress the reader. Neither is there the slightest effort to disprove any apparently supernatural happenings, or to offer a material, common-sense interpretation. There is no expression of faith, there is no symptom of disbelief. There is not even a parade of open-mindedness. The characters discuss the ghostly appearance from their different angles; but "the story," as De Morgan puts it, takes no angle at all. It merely narrates.

Nor can it be said that the story—collectively speaking—shows any signs of undue tendency toward "bogey things." They come and they go. *Joseph Vance* has no hint of any supernatural occurrence. There followed the full-fledged ghost story of *Alice-for-Short*. *Somehow Good* has the merest trace of Psychical Re-

search at the *Major's* death-bed. *It Never Can Happen Again* has little more—*Blind Jim's* dying fancy that his little lass of whose death he has been kept in ignorance, is running to meet him with her well-remembered cry of "Pi-lot!" *A Likely Story*, on the contrary, hinges entirely on a supernatural fantasy—a portrait that talks.

When Ghost Meets Ghost, of course, does not treat of ghosts at all, in any usual sense. This is quite what we expect of De Morgan—the unexpected. While *The Old Madhouse*, a title whose announcement brought to mind the experiences of *Old Jane*, in *Alice-for-Short*, turns out to have nothing in common with that strange tale, but to be instead a ghost story *par excellence*.

De Morgan let the secret slip when he apologized in confidence to his readers, at the close of one of the novels. "Every book," he maintained, "has a right to an assumption intrinsically improbable, to make the story go. What a flat tragedy Hamlet would have been without its fundamental ghost!" Of this right the author freely avails himself; the surprise lies in his wide definition of the improbable. Sometimes it is startling coincidence, as in *Somehow Good*, or an intensely complicated legal mixture, as in *Challis's* conflicts with the marriage law. These things are highly improbable, indeed. So is the sequence of events that separates and later reunites the twin sisters *Maisie* and *Phoebe*. Dying apparitions, too, while not matters of daily experience, are not unheard of in psychical research quarters. But a picture that not only possesses conversational powers, but is able to extend those

powers to its reproduction in a photograph, seems rather weakly characterized as an improbability. We should be tempted to supply a stronger term.

If *Maddalena* is something more than "intrinsically improbable," what, indeed, shall we say to *Uncle Drury*? Our conventional idea of a ghost involves gloomy midnight, wailing storms, misty apparitions, ominous cries, horrors generally. A fat old gentleman in clerical garb, announced by the servants, chatting in desultory fashion, consulting his watch, wiping his eye-glasses,—surely he would be hard put to it to prove himself a wraith at all. Clearly he is an impostor—only pretending to be a ghost, after all. There must be another door in the old house which *Charles* has never discovered. Vanishing is too great a feat for so substantial a vision.

De Morgan loved to play with a thought, an idea, in the same whimsical fashion which makes his employment of language so delightful. His was the mathematician's mind, which on assuming a hypothesis naturally pursues it to a conclusion. If a ghost returns in the appearance of its mundane existence, if its features are the same to our eye, why deny it clothes? By the way, did the ghost of Hamlet's father wear a crown? Grant *Uncle Drury* any reappearance at all, and it is foolishly illogical to refuse him his spectacles and timepiece, gaiters and pocket-handkerchief. Once let the camel get his nose under the tent flap, and the whole bulk follows. De Morgan for one is deeply interested in seeing the second hump come into view.

Another bit of logic fiction makers have not ven-

tured upon is making the same apparition visible and audible to different people. *Uncle Drury* is quite the usual caller until his strange disappearance gives a fright to the household. Now if *Charles* alone had been vouchsafed the interview, a loophole would have remained for the theory that the whole occurrence was subjective, a figment of a tortured brain. But *Charles* could not claim to share the subjectivity of the parlor-maid or the gardener. The author leaves no way of escape. He seems to say: If you accept this premise at all, accept it absolutely. Take it with all its implications and conclusions. If a ghost can see and be seen, it can appear to an entire household. If it can make sounds at all, it can carry on a conversation. In fact, the only point on which concession was made to the traditional ghost was in *Uncle Drury's* refusal to shake *Charley's* outstretched hand. *Gwen*—in another story—cites a historical instance which approves his wisdom in refraining from actual contact. "You know Lady Katharine Stuartlaverock tried to kiss her lover's ghost, and he gave, and she went through."

Here the rule best followed is *Mr. Pelly's* determination to "switch off skepticism for the time being." He, you will recall from *A Likely Story,* made up his mind "to be passive, and not allow an ill-timed incredulity to mar a good delusion in the middle." So he held his peace while *Maddalena's* beautiful portrait told its tale of love and intrigue.

"Psychical Research," reads a paragraph of reflection on *Alice's* vision of the lidy wiv' spots, "requires at least one votary of diabolical tenacity of purpose to

keep the life in it. Almost every living human creature has some measure of interest in Ghosts and Bogies, but it is a measure that is very apt to run out after say twenty minutes' sitting at an unresponsive table, with your little fingers in contact with your neighbors' 'to keep up the current;' or after maybe sleeping one night in a haunted house and not seeing a gray woman; or covering a quire of foolscap with planchette writing from your co-querist's first husband and then finding that she is *Miss* (whereas you thought for certain she was *Mrs.*) Smith; or being told that young Blank had confessed that it was he pushed the table, just to show what awful asses the Company (including yourself) were. It is true the interest will revive sooner or later; but it is an intermittent one, and requires philosophical thought and temper to do it full justice. In the commonplace mind it is apt to lapse unless kept up to the mark by the stimulus of a neighboring philosopher. Let us all do honor to those who (according to the testimony of their scientific opponents) have passed through long periods of patient research watching for spectres that never come; weighing mediums *in vacuo* and finding they weigh exactly what you would expect; grappling with other mediums who worm their way out of the cabinet in the dark; and getting smudged by materialisations with vermilion and lampblack superposed on the medium for test-purposes. Never mind if I put some of these points wrongly; join me in admiration of the persistent philosophy that recognizes the fact that no amount of negative evidence absolutely proves that anything

whatever isn't due to any cause we choose to invent a name for."

But this is *apropos* of the beliefs of others, and the story reminds us "One generally makes up for one's behavior towards the Psychical Researches of others by the excessive impartiality, amounting sometimes to onesidedness, with which one treats one's own."

Each of us does treasure some little belief of this sort, we are more than once reminded. Thus *Rosalind* lends credence, "though her superstition was weak-kneed," to the death-bed appearance of the old *Major.* Thus *Peggy* accepts little *Alice's* story as a real vision. So *Mrs. Cartaret* credited her dream, for she too "was one of those who want to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds; to scoff at bodies like ourselves for being superstitious; but to call in Natural Law to protect their own phenomena. For there is never a soul but keeps one, somewhere."

What may be the author's pet instance of Supernaturalism does not appear. But an enjoyment of the subject generally is plainly enough indicated. Its very terminology is sheer delight to one with De Morgan's fondness for verbal jugglery. "Unconscious cerebration," "pseudo-real hypermnemonism," "autophrenetic experience," "self-induced hypnosis" — no wonder he relished the flavor of these morsels. As *Lady Upwell* views the matter, "It's a thing one ought to be able to say. Don't let's forget it again." The author, to be sure, would not forget anything so delectable.

He is quite equal to maintaining the converse of the ghostly appearance, namely, that we ourselves are but

apparitions; and with equal logic. *Maddalena* argues the matter with eloquence.

"I refer to the reality of our existence, a subject to which the most frivolous amongst us can not afford to be indifferent. Have you never considered that the only person of whose existence we have *absolute* certainty is *ourself*? Outside and beyond it, are we not painfully dependent upon the evidence of our senses? What is our dearest friend to us but a series of impressions on our sight, touch and hearing, plus the conclusion we draw—possibly unsound—that what we touch is also what we see, and that what we hear proceeds from both?"

Adrian Torrens goes further still, maintaining that "one gets less and less identical as Time goes on." Future existence is a riddle, our author seems to say. But so, for that matter, is existence in the present tense. Speculation about these enigmas is an unfailing diversion for one's lighter moments, as well as food for serious consideration. Perhaps, with *Charley* in *Alice-for-Short*, the author inclined to the view sanctioned by Common-Sense; but he could not refrain from the reflection that this presupposes and demands "grouping the Impossible, the Probable and the Actual, with good sharp boundary lines between the groups." It is the lack of definition in these lines of which he is most conscious. He will tell a story, and leave the reader to decide in which group it belongs. We can chat with *Uncle Drury* and leave undisturbed the question as to his permanent address and mode of existence. Ghost or hallucination, subconscious or material? Find your own solution.

VIII. DE MORGAN AND THE VICTORIANS

"Among epochs one treads gingerly, like the skater on ice that scarcely bears him. I may take as an instance a book I wrote, called Somehow Good, whose cradle, as it were, was the Twopenny Tube. The frequent reference to this story as an 'Early Victorian' tale has impressed me that Early Victorianism is an abstract quality, which owes its fascination neither to its earliness nor to its epoch."

The characterization of De Morgan as Early Victorian began with *Joseph Vance;* and clung to him thereafter no matter what era he described. The time of *Joseph* ranges from the Eighteen-forties to the end of the century; it comprehends almost the entirety of Victoria's reign in England. Little *Alice* breaks the famous bit of pottery in the early Sixties, and her personal story is concluded with the end of the following decade. But *Old Jane's* life dates back to the beginning of the century; and the old mystery a goodly number of years further than that. The action of both *Somehow Good* and *It Never Can Happen Again* is entirely within the twentieth century; twopenny tubes and motor cars fix the time as well as "Charley's Aunt" and the Deceased Wife's Sister Act. *An Affair of Dishonor* is Carolean, not Victorian. *A Likely Story* is of the days of the Boer War—Victorian but

by no means Early. *The Old Madhouse* still hovers about the close of the century. *When Ghost Meets Ghost* is the only one of them all that is Early Victorian throughout, in actual time; gas lamps illumine the streets, or strive to do so, and Rigoletto is the new opera. Cigarettes are an innovation even for the male sex; and ladies ride in landaulets or glide about in crinoline.

All this De Morgan can describe with as good a right as motor car or gramophone. For does not his own life cover all this space and more? To a generation whose memory goes scarcely back to the present century, this is a difficult thing to realize. If you started in with the Nineteen Hundreds, the world is for you but twenty years of age, and Spain's defeat by the United States is ancient history, only dimly realized as slightly nearer than her defeat by England in the days of the Armada. Your father perhaps recalls when telephones were new, and your grandfather might tell of the debates between Douglas and Lincoln. This man, who only yesterday went from us, had these things, or their English equivalents, in his own recollection. Victoria was England's new queen when he was born, and his span of life was about the same as hers. Yet as a writer all his achievement lies in the reigns of her son and grandson, while much of his writing looks back to "the days of crinolines; of hair in cabbage-nets, packed round rubber-inflations; of what may be called proto-croquet, with hoops so large that no one ever failed to get through, except you and me; the days when *Ah che la morte* was the

last new tune, and Landseer and Mulready the last words in Art. They were the days when there had been but one Great Exhibition—think of it!—and the British fleet could still get under canvas. We, being an old fogy, would so much like to go back to those days." So, we suppose, any normal person of seventy-five might look affectionately back on the days when he was fifteen; without discrediting utterly the "all sorts of upnesses-to-date" of his later years. For a good half of his stories take place in those later years, after all, and the term Early Victorian is applicable, if at all, in a Pickwickian sense only.

De Morgan himself credited to the great Victorian his own achievements as a novelist; but in this he was far too modest. True, many points of similarity, many analogies of plot and situation, can be pointed out. The story is told that a good part of his first novel as originally written was destroyed because it was deemed too obviously imitative of Dickens. But the likeness is more superficial than real; and it is in the points of difference that De Morgan's real greatness shines.

In the length of his novels, in their discursiveness, their leisurely manner, their hosts of character and wealth of details, De Morgan holds the Victorian tradition. Modernity gives us an hour's acquaintance with a half dozen folk at some vital moment in their lives. The ideal of this sort of fiction is as succinct and well formed as a problem in quadratics. In the last chapter the value of x is determined, and all is well. In the modern sense, the wide ranging and slowly mov-

ing tales of Dickens and Thackeray are not Art at all. They are instead Humanity, without which, after all, Art would never have existed.

"Gossiping with one's readers is a disreputable Early Victorian practice, and far from Modern," De Morgan admits, and freely terms himself old fogy in this matter, too. It is a practice endeared to us by Thackeray and Trollope; but a much finer instrument in De Morgan's hands than in theirs. He has no thesis to prove, as had Dickens; no smarts and injuries to avenge; he had a mellower humor, a kindlier philosophy. Indeed in spirit he bears far more resemblance to a writer earlier than the earliest Victorian—Jane Austen.

Dickens caricatures where De Morgan characterizes. *Micawber* is the personification of a single trait; *Christopher Vance* is a person entire. Dickens drew all classes with a keen sense of distinction; he defended the low vehemently, he derided the high angrily. De Morgan ranged as far for his types but with this difference: he found friends in every class. He did not think virtue or attractiveness a question of birth or pedigree. When *Eugene Wrayburn* married *Lizzie Hexam,* they both felt, with the author, that it was an enormous condescension, to be paid for by social ostracism. Though Dickens has been at much pains to impress upon us *Lizzie's* superiority of character; though she has received instruction and training for a so-called higher sphere; yet there is an impassible barrier from the mere fact that she is the daughter of a waterman. To the twentieth century

mind this is bound to seem rather silly; and in a situation of this sort De Morgan was of our century and no other. He was even in advance of our day. *Janey* has no sense of stepping down in the social scale when she marries *Joe*; *Charley* is as glad to be accepted by *Alice* as if she had come from a palace instead of the extensive basement with cellarage from which he rescued her. The sense of social distinctions is left to those who feel them most keenly — the servants of Grosvenor Square.

The situation in which *Rosalind* finds herself is not unlike that of *Lady Dedlock*. There could not be a clearer illustration of De Morgan's divergence from the Victorian tradition. It is the difference between melodrama and life. *Rosalind* is not going to flee through the night, pursued by *Sally* and the police, and perish with her head on a damp gravestone. She has been a madcap headstrong girl and has had to suffer deeply in consequence; but she does not evade her responsibilities nor live in shuddering fear that her secrets may be revealed. When the strangest of chances brings *Fenwick* back to her, there is "nettle-grasping" enough in the situation, it is true. We share *Rosalind's* anxiety over the result of her husband's complete recovery of the memory of those sad unhappy far-off times; but never for a moment do we anticipate battle, murder and sudden death as the outcome. Our people are too real for that; we know them too well. The Early Victorian would have felt *Rosalind's* fault beyond expiation; bitterness and dis-

grace would have been her portion forever after. De Morgan is of a new century in this.

In another sense, Victorianism has been interpreted to mean hypocrisy and prudery, a stuffy curtain of taboos hiding unmentionable excesses and indulgences. Undoubtedly false notions of delicacy, false conventions in both life and literature, have worked much harm. We are paying the penalty of that long repression in the wave of license that has succeeded it. We surmise that the little girl with the wavy forelock was too closely under the eye of a stern Victorian aunt. When she was very very good to all outward seeming, she was really seething and about to boil over into the horridness of her later manner. Undoubtedly, when she had thus asserted herself, she subsided into a more normal little girl, in whom goodness and badness formed a reasonable and not disagreeable compound.

In the same way we have passed from the time when the preachers must have blushed to repeat the text, "Male and female created he them," to a day when no one, preacher or writer or reformer, wants to discuss anything else. What one generation concealed in dark corners the next proclaims with trumpets and drums in the market place. Eighteen-fifty tried to crowd sex out of its treatment of life; Nineteen-twenty tries to crowd everything else out.

The wave is at its crest, and already shows signs of recession. We are approaching a calmer perspective on the whole question. Let us hope that as hypocrisy on the subject of sex has been shouted out of court, so the tendency to gloat over its manifestations will dis-